



Past Exposure At Schools

EPA Information Center * 501 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923 *
(406)293-6194

Fact Sheet Number 7

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Many Libby parents have kids that attended Libby schools where vermiculite mining waste and ore waste had been deposited. This waste had the potential to expose people to amphibole asbestos. Similarly, many kids played on baseball fields which were adjacent to the former W.R. Grace export plant. EPA has investigated and cleaned-up amphibole asbestos contamination in these areas.

Concerns and questions remain about whether or not the students or staff were exposed to asbestos. If so, what should they do, or what can they expect in the future? Students, former students, staff who may have worked in areas around vermiculite and anyone who frequented any of the contaminated areas may have these concerns about their exposure.

Potentially exposed people include:

- ✓ Anyone who played in or around the old skating rink at Plummer School between 1980 and April 2001
- ✓ Anyone who used the Middle School and High School tracks between 1973 and April 2001
- ✓ Anyone who played baseball on the fields adjacent to the former vermiculite export plant
- ✓ Kids who played in the vermiculite piles near the export plant ball fields

What is the risk to my child who played, rolled and wrestled in or threw the dirt around the Plummer skating rink?

Children who played in the contaminated area at Plummer were almost certainly exposed to amphibole asbestos. However, it is impossible to determine the risk your child faces because of the number of variables involved in determining exposure and risk. For example: where the kids played; whether the games included being on the ground or kicking up dirt; how often they played there; for how long at a time; and over how many years will vary depending on the child. Since the amount of exposure is unknown, it would be prudent to monitor your child for any changes in their health that could be related to asbestos exposure.

What about Zonolite attic insulation at Central school and other schools in Libby?

Like many homes and businesses in the Libby area, Zonolite attic insulation was used in some of the public buildings including schools. EPA sampled in classrooms and living space and found no levels of immediate concern. However, as in other buildings EPA is concerned about people who may come in contact with the Zonolite insulation. Of particular concern are people who may directly encounter the insulation on a regular basis such as electrical contractors, janitors, or repairmen. The potential for release of amphibole asbestos fibers during renovation activities also remains a concern. EPA's Region 8 office is recommending to HQ that vermiculite insulation be removed from all Libby homes, businesses and public buildings.

What is the risk to my family from a child who brought this home on his clothes? History shows us

the miners did this with tragic consequences.

It is possible that amphibole asbestos contamination may have been tracked home in this way. However, it is likely that the amount of asbestos brought home is far less than was brought home by former miners. Only home-specific sampling can determine to what degree a family might be exposed to asbestos. EPA continues to conduct sampling and will continue through the winter 2001/2002 and into 2003. If someone wishes to have their homes sampled, please call the EPA Information Center and request to have your home sampled.

If asbestos fibers are found in a home, it is difficult to determine how the fibers got there unless a complete history of the home, its past and current residents, and all activities that anyone who came into the home was engaged in could be reconstructed.

Minors who spent at least eight hours a day for five days a week sometimes for several years undoubtedly brought more amphibole asbestos home than a child who played in a certain play area at recess. Even if the child played at the most hazardous spot for the entire recess, during every recess, all week for several years, which is doubtful, they would not have brought home as much contamination as a worker who worked around vermiculite all day.

What should I do if I believe my child was exposed?

ATSDR and EPA recommend consulting your doctor or a public health official who specializes in asbestos exposure, as a good first step. There are individual exposure factors which make it difficult to recommend a single course of action for everyone. Please call the Center for Asbestos Related Disease in Libby at 293-9274 for additional information.

How can I get medical care if I don't have insurance or don't currently have a doctor ?

For some general information about your particular situation you may go to or call the Center for Asbestos Related Disease or the Community Health Center (CHC). Staff at these health care facilities can help you decide what course of action is right for you, and guide you in your selection of a health care provider. The CHC was initiated to serve the residents of Lincoln County. The CHC uses a sliding scale to charge resident's according to their ability to pay so that people are not denied medical care because they are unemployed or uninsured. CHC Staff will be happy to discuss your particular situation.

What is being done to enhance detection of exposure in five and six year old children?

ATSDR does not recommend x-rays for kids under 18 years of age. Child lung x-rays are considered to be an unnecessary test because changes to the lung, associated with asbestos exposure, usually take years to develop, if at all. In addition, the gamma rays of an x-ray pose a higher health risk for children. Pulmonary Function Tests (such as ATSDR's medical screening included) can be done with children but it is not a conclusive test for children. Some children may find it difficult to even complete the test.

While children are growing and developing, they undergo so many changes that it is impossible to positively relate lung capacity and illness. Changes, or variables, in children that can affect lung capacity include lung development, chest musculature, and the child's activities. There is no good "normal" lung capacity to compare to young children's test results. Even if there was a reliable test to use in detecting lung abnormalities in young children, because of the long latency period (10-40 years) for asbestos-related diseases, it is unlikely that the effects of asbestos could be seen in children under ten years old.

Research is being done at the University of Montana and other locations to help develop genetic tests for biomarkers which will do two things. If developed, the tests would indicate whether an individual is

more likely to develop an asbestos-related disease and allow doctors to determine the amount of actual asbestos exposure with more accuracy. The research is in the early stage, so seeing your own doctor to discuss what's best for you is still the best course of action.

What can children who were exposed expect for the next twenty - thirty years?

The course of asbestos-related disease is different for everyone. Some people who were exposed never develop disease. Even with first hand knowledge of what the exposure was, it is impossible to predict what people can expect in the future. The best course of action will be to avoid anything that could further harm the lungs such as working in a dusty area without adequate protection, smoking or breathing secondhand smoke more than occasionally. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's health care provider. The doctor will make recommendations based upon your child's personal history of possible exposure. ATSDR will coordinate with State and local public health agencies to address the latency period issue as children who were not initially eligible for medical testing begin to age.

Who can I call if I have other questions?

EPA Contacts

Paul Peronard, On-Scene Coordinator
Toll Free 1-800-227-8917 x6808
(303) 312-6808

Wendy Thomi, Community Involvement Coordinator
Toll Free 1-866-457-2690 x5037
(406) 457-5037

Jim Christiansen, Remedial Project Manager
(303) 312-6748

Dr. Chris Weis, Toxicologist
1-800-227-8917 x6671

U.S. Public Health Service

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

Dr. Aubrey Miller, Public Health Doctor
(303) 844-7857

Dan Strausbaugh, Montana/Libby Representative
(406) 457-5007

Center for Asbestos Related Disease

Lincoln County Community Health Center

Pat Cohan, CARD Clinic Coordinator
(406) 293-9274

Kimberly Rowse, RN - CHC Executive Director
(406) 293-3755

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For More Information

Community members are encouraged to stop by the EPA Information Center in downtown Libby at 501 Mineral Avenue or contact any of the team members listed inside. The Information Center is open weekdays from 8:30 am - 5:00 pm and is a good place to get more information, ask questions or express concerns.

The phone number is (406) 293-6194.

